Stanley R. Mickelsen Safeguard Complex

The Stanley R. Mickelsen Safeguard Complex (SRMSC) was authorized by Congress in 1969 and construction began in 1970. When the U.S. and the former Soviet Union signed the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in May 1972, it originally permitted both countries to deploy defensive systems at two separate locations. A 1974 protocol between the signatories limited each to only one ABM site with a total of 100 ABM launchers. The U.S. chose the site near Grand Forks, N.D., as the designated ABM complex.

The SRMSC was named after Lt. Gen. Stanley Raymond Mickelsen, a former commanding general of the Army Air Defense Command.

Although construction was completed in October 1974, the complex did not reach full operational capability until October 1975. The Safeguard System Complex remained operational until Feb. 10, 1976, when it was inactivated in accordance with direction by Congress.

The SRMSC was the only operational ABM facility ever completed in the United States. The complex is centered around the small town of Nekoma, N.D., which is about 100 miles northwest of Grand Forks.

The SRMSC consists of six sites: The Perimeter Acquisition Radar (PAR) site, the operation of which was transferred to the U.S. Air Force in 1977; the Missile Site Radar (MSR) site; and four Remote Sprint Launch (RSL) sites.

The PAR is still in use today as part of the Spacetrack Missile Warning System. The site covers 270 acres, none of which contain missile fields. The original purpose of the PAR was to detect missiles launched at the U.S. over the North Pole. Some of the site's buildings were hardened against nuclear effects and had the ability to operate autonomously while "buttoned up" against a nuclear blast.

Below is the Perimeter Acquisition Radar. At right is a Sprint missile as it is being launched.

The MSR site covers 430 acres. Originally, the site consisted of a radar and a missile field of 30 launchers for Spartan long-range, nuclear warhead missiles. The MSR had a dual purpose. It was to acquire targets and to control launch and guidance of interceptors to their targets. The site buildings were also hardened against nuclear effects and could operate self-sufficiently while under nuclear attack. Between December 1975 and 1977, all missiles were removed from the MSR, missile silos were sealed, and all tactical buildings salvaged and sealed.

The four RSL sites cover between 40 and 49 acres a piece, with a total of 54 Sprint Launchers (in addition to the 16 at the MSR). These sites, like the PAR and MSR, were hardened and self-sufficient. By 1977, all missiles had been removed from the silo launchers, silos sealed, and buildings salvaged and sealed.

Since there was not enough water readily available to various parts of the missile complex, a multi-million dollar water supply system was constructed. The system consists of 10 wells, three booster pump stations, storage tanks and lagoons, and about 60 miles of pipeline. The system was designed to supply a million gallons of water a day to the entire complex. Currently, the PAR uses about one-quarter of this amount.

The complex was essentially abandoned and ignored from 1978 until December 1989, when an environmental on-site inspection found polychlorinated byphenyls (PCBs). This resulted in the testing, disposal and clean-up of millions of gallons of water in the structures and items containing PCBs.

One of the goals of the Missile Defense Act of 1991 is to deploy an anti-ballistic missile system capable of providing a highly effective U.S. defense against limited ballistic missile attacks. As part of the MDA, initial National Missile Defense at a single site was considered, as the initial step toward later deployment of an ABM system at several sites. Currently, the SRMSC is the only treaty-compliant site available for the ABM system.

The complex was in a caretaker status under the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and GSA until December 1991, when USASDC obtained accountability for the property. The SMRSC will remain in a caretaker status under the U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command (SMDC) until the site might be used again as part of the NMD ABM system.

Above is the Missile Site Radar at the Mickelson Safeguard Site. At right is a Spartan missile being launched.

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